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WALT WHITMAN

**THE POET OF THE
WIDER SELFHOOD**

121

WALT WHITMAN

THE POET OF THE WIDER SELFHOOD

BY

MILA TUPPER MAYNARD



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1903

W.H.

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Helen Maynard

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A Glimpse of the Man

WALT WHITMAN

I.—A Glimpse of the Man

"Convict Whitman of any narrowness or partiality whatever and you strike him a fatal blow. The one thing he must be to make good his claim is to be all-inclusive of humanity."—*John Addington Symonds*.

"Walt Whitman is the best, most perfect, example the world has so far had of the Cosmic Sense."—*Richard Maurice Burke*.

Walt Whitman is an offshoot of some of the oldest American families. For many generations his ancestors had lived upon Long Island and were Dutch and English. Upon one side an ardent Quaker strain is found.

Born in 1819, his death in 1892 found an old man who had breathed to the full the richest maturity of a marvelous century. The experiences of the poet's life were well adapted to that ideal of inclusive knowledge and sympathy which controlled his thought. He spent most of his life in the great cities of New York, Brooklyn, Washington, and Cam-

den, where the surging of multitudinous human interests fascinated and awed him unceasingly.

For several years he wandered in the then Far West, living in New Orleans for some time, but experiencing many forms of rough life through the pioneer wilds of the Mississippi Valley. Even earlier he had taught school in the country regions of the East, seeing the life of all as only the "boarding around" custom of those days made possible.

In occupations he was as inclusive as in all else; farmer, teacher, traveler, printer, editor, carpenter, mechanic, writer, nurse in army hospitals, clerk in government offices—he was all of these at times, and never allowed any activity to preoccupy him so that he was not first of all a lover of human beings.

Wherever there was humanity, his affections were enlisted.

The less a man or woman was conventionalized or artificially cultured, the more his interest was aroused. Manhood in spontaneity, and natural vigor always impressed him with reverential respect. With this attitude, all occupations and all experiences became rich harvests of broadened sympathies and living knowledge.

The army hospital service of Walt Whitman served a needed purpose in uniting him to the people of his day and country.

His passion of passions was love of America and of his countrymen. But the publication of "Leaves of Grass," in 1855, had brought upon him the most severe criticism.

Contempt or disgust had met his new outlook and new method. The devoted nurse, loving and beloved of the boys in blue, was a figure which gradually took the place in popular thought of the shameless ignoramus whom they pictured as the author of the "Leaves."

Those who came in personal contact with Whitman were always impressed with the calm greatness, spotless cleanliness, and quiet tenderness of the man. This impression which the personal friend could gain all the world may feel in equal measure through a study of the records of his life among the wounded soldiers.

He goes among them first seeking a brother whom report has placed in serious danger. He cannot, after seeing the distressing need, leave the others, and for several years, until his own health is undermined, he gives himself entirely to the men.

He does not serve as official nurse or in any regular capacity, but reserves himself for the innumerable offices which others cannot render. He is always freshly dressed, strong voiced, full of cheer. He knows when discouragement and loneliness are causing deeper wounds than bullet gash. He knows when the strong natured man yearns for the kiss and caress as much as a child in arms, and gives such gracious benediction with ready tenderness.

He is absolutely fearless, going amid contagion from which others shrink, with scarcely a thought, because he "felt to do so."

This boyish confession to his mother reveals much: "Mother, I have real pride in telling you that I have the consciousness of saving quite a number of lives by keeping the men from giving up, and being a good deal with them. The men say it is so, and the doctors say it is so, and I will candidly confess I can see it is true, though I say it myself. I know you will like to hear it, mother, so I tell you."

The physical perfection of Walt Whitman was always remarked by those who saw him prior to this hospital experience. Thereafter, while the outline and general bearing always

gave the impression of a fine physique, he was in reality partially paralyzed and much of an invalid.

So large a part of Whitman philosophy had centered in a glorification of humanity as an incarnation of strength and power that it was peculiarly hard that he should have lost his physical robustness. In spite of this and in spite of poverty also, the man did not lose in poise or sweetness of spirit.

“Specimen Days” was written during the pressure of these misfortunes.

Burke says of this: “It is the sanest and sweetest of books, the brightest and halest diary of an invalid ever written.” Up to the last his courage and charity never wavered.

He was as pleased as a child over any word which indicated appreciation of his work, but was never troubled or at all affected by censure or misunderstanding.

He regarded his writing not as literature, but as the expression of a religion. It was a “cause” to him, and all that indicated an understanding of his thought rejoiced him as an advancement of this cause.

Friends came slowly. Emerson, however, welcomed the new writer at the outset with full appreciation.

"Americans may now return from Europe," he said, "for unto us a man is born."

In England appreciation came faster than at home—possibly because England expects the outlandish from America, and possibly because editions were published there which omitted the extreme forms of Whitman's realism.

Among his ardent admirers have been some of the most striking figures in modern times. Each year adds to the number of those who regard themselves as disciples of the Whitman gospel. This band includes most of the ardent young workers in American art, literature, and reform. Among the older and more mature admirers are John Addington Symonds, of England, and John Burroughs, of America. One a scholar of most classic mold—an authority in the literature of half a score of languages; the other pre-eminently a nature lover and artist, a scientist in the realm of "whatsoever things are lovely."

Professor Symonds confesses that Whitman rescued him from the dry rot of scholastic dilettantism and negative skepticism, and brought him in touch with humanity and thrilled him with cosmic enthusiasm. "Leaves of Grass," he said, influenced him more than

any book except the Bible—more than Plato; more than Goethe.

“Speaking about Whitman is like speaking about the universe,” Mr. Symonds affirms, referring to the vastness of his scope and the mystery and exhaustlessness of his message.

What is more remarkable, Mr. Symonds, while deprecating some elements in Whitman’s style, stakes his reputation as a literary critic upon the genuine poetical quality of most of this poet’s work.

John Burroughs’s study of Whitman is a poem in itself, and leaves no doubt that the critic is a poet, whether Whitman is one or not.

He regards Whitman as a prototype of a new order in literature and in human dynamics—a prophet of a new religious outlook, akin to cosmic forces. “I believe,” he says, “that Whitman supplies in fuller measure that pristine element, something akin to the unbreathed air of mountain and shore, which makes the arterial blood of poetry and literature, than any other modern writer.” Burroughs asserts also that there is “a rapidly growing circle of those who are beginning to turn to Whitman as the most imposing and significant figure in our literary annals.”

The present time is marked by a new out-

reaching in sympathy and understanding. To this generation then, whatever its verdict upon the art of Whitman, his spirit and message will appeal with ever increasing force.

Here is found that reverence for one's own nature which magnifies its divinity and unlimited potency. Here is that conscious oneness with the All of Things—the cosmic selfhood which is the blessedness of all religions, but the peculiar heritage of the modern, science-taught faith. Here is the confident assurance of the eternal identity of the self in an enlarging immortality. Here is patriotism, made at one with all radiant ideals of human unity and evolving harmony.

In these poems is such a conception of democracy as only the Christ-like lovers of "these my brethren, even these least" can understand. In them we find the larger womanhood struck out in magnificent outlines—a challenge to undreamed power and strength.

Here we find manhood claiming its own in tenderness and gentle sympathy as well as in potency and might. Wider sympathies are here. The past is never spurned. Irony has no place. All has come by the gracious privilege of blunder and half success.

Even evil is given its beatitude in the all-inclusive sympathies of this world lover.

Outer nature, of tree and bird call, as well as in star sweep and earthquake, are made part and parcel of the one beauty and order which man incarnates.

In these aspects we shall study these poems of the poet of the wider self.

The Copious Personal Self

II.—The Copious Personal Self

I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold.

Absurd egotism seemed to early critics of Whitman's poems to mark all of his work.

To have an author give his own name to his chief poem and have the personal pronoun the chief character on every page, whatever the title of the poem, was something new and too absurd for patience, it was thought.

This is a feature of his general method and outlook which the student of his poems must master at the outset or find little that is worth while.

Whitman was possessed with the fact of man's divinity.

So much is said upon this subject in these latter days, that humanity's divinity is something of a truism, little as its full significance is generally realized. Forty years ago it was rarely admitted, even as a theory. Whitman accepted this as a truth, pondered over it, delighted in it, became intoxicated with its wondrous and dynamic import.

He, then, was an out-cropping of the Deity. He was a part of divine power. His nature was a test and revelation of infinite nature. All the mystery and beauty of experience as it came aroused in him the ardor and devotion of religious abandon.

But each human being equally incarnates the supreme life of all. No one then can be commonplace. Each is an object of adoration and reverence. All that is great or good or heroic or wise in one is the birthright and final attainment of each. Yea, more than the highest has guessed is the lowest sometime to attain.

Painters have painted their swarming groups, and the center figure of all
From the head of the center figure spreading a nimbus
of gold-colored light,
But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without
its nimbus of gold-colored light,
From my hand, from the brain of every man and woman
it streams, effulgently flowing forever.

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my
own face in the glass.
And nothing—not God—is greater to one than one's
self is.

All the records of Zeus and Odin, of Brahma
or Buddha do not bring humility to him.

Whatever mankind has known or imagined of divine achievement must be simply a token of what may be for all.

Accepting the rough, deific sketches to fill out better in myself—bestowing them freely on each man or woman I see.

After picturing tenderly countless exhibitions of heroism and nobleness he affirms:

These become mine and me every one—and they are but little. I become as much more as I like.

This claim of unity with all does not stop with claiming the highest.

I become any presence or truth of humanity here,
See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull unintermittent pain.
Not a youngster is taken for larceny, but I go up, too,
and am tried and sentenced.
Askers embody themselves in me, and I am embodied
in them,
I project my hat, sit shamefaced and beg.

In his own person he “intercedes for every person born.” He would have all these affirm with him.

I chant the chant of dilation and pride,
We have had ducking and deprecating about enough,
I show that size is only development.
Have you outstripped the rest? Are you the president?
It is a trifle—they will more than arrive there every one
and still pass on.

The self-reliance urged by Emerson is fulfilled by Whitman in startling literalness.

He believes in his own message with unswerving assurance, and does not shift from what he feels is his own peculiar path, even when Emerson himself urges a modified form.

I know that I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize;
I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.

This self-confidence he yearns to make each one of all the race feel each for himself.

O, the joys of a manly selfhood!
Personality — to be servile to none — to defer to none —
not to any tyrant, known or unknown,
To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and elastic,
To look with a calm gaze, or with a flashing eye,
To speak with a full voice out of a broad chest,
To confront with your personality all the other personalities of the earth.

The poem, "To You, Whoever You Are," is an epitome of this and much besides in the peculiar burden of Whitman to his kind. Its message is to each one, especially to the man or woman who feels alone, uncounted, useless. In it he appeals with personal passion to each uncounted person in the concrete. They have

been lost to themselves in the rush of affairs, but he looks through to the soul and finds the real man or woman. While others do not understand he will understand. While others find imperfections he will see only the perfect.

I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself—

O, I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you!
You have not known what you are.

He assures them that no glory or power anywhere that is not for this one person who-ever he may be whom he addresses.

Every endowment, every virtue, all the beauty, pluck, endurance of any is tallied in this imaginary average one over whom he yearns.

Whoever you are! claim your own at all hazards!

Under any and all conditions if you assert yourself, all hindrances will slip away and through whatever bogs of disposition or ignorance "what you are picks its way."

The quality of life is as important as the courage and vehemence with which it is asserted.

"Copious" and spiritual it must be—large of spirit—wide as all sympathies can make it,

electric at every pore with the sensitive thrills that unite to all nature, all humankind.

Tender as he is of all men, even the dullest and the most shallow, he yet challenges them to arouse out of such death in life and learn to live in real things.

He finds many walking about with the dimes of death on the eyelids, liberally spooning the brains to feed the greed of the belly; working with the trappings of life, never with the reality.

Tickets buying, taking, selling, and then to the feast never once going.

All this torpid poverty to the best in life need not be. Each may claim whatever he is ready to appropriate.

I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete!

I swear the earth remains broken and jagged only to him or her who remains broken and jagged.

The poorest in dollars may by richness of feeling take possession of more than the "ticket-selling" millionaire knows is in existence. "For you, pocketless of a dime, may purchase the pick of the universe."

This fullness of life lies in freedom from the bonds of convention, fear, self-distrust, and

through entering into the love and joy open to all.

Freedom is the condition of all real life; love and joy, the substance of that life when it is found.

“Whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral, dressed in his own shroud.” Sympathy, without pity—the sympathy of imaginative oneness of life—the sympathy that becomes all men under all circumstances—this is the enlarging life of love.

Such sympathy swallows up even the nobler bondage of duty. For to the nature alive to the living selves of others, duty gives place to glad spontaneity.

What others give as duties, I give as living impulses;
(Shall I give the heart's action as a duty?)

“A Song of Joys” fairly splashes in an ocean of delights, and yet all this exultation is in the commonest of the common life experiences. He enters into the life of all kinds of persons: the fisher and the boatman, delighting in the freedom and freshness of their work, its fragrance, and its spur; the engineer’s pride and delight in the power he controls and the swiftness he secures; the horseman, the fireman, even the “strong brawned fighter”—the

pleasures of each are embraced in full appreciation.

All over the continent the poet's imagination carries him, seeking the delights of inland lake and stream, of the forests and mountains. The farmer, the miner, soldier, the mother, the child—the peculiar charm in the experience of each is caught and held with skillful touch.

And among all none is more delicious than "the joy of that vast elemental sympathy which only the human soul is capable of generating and emitting in steady and limitless floods," or the ripe joy of "my soul leaning poised on itself"—the soul which has caught the sense of supremacy over circumstances and calamities.

Whitman everywhere expresses this poise which comes from unlimited self-confidence and appreciation balanced by an equal regard for the potential self of every one else.

There need be no fear of an egotism along whose whole length runs sympathy and belief in mankind. Moreover, an egotism which yields fullness of joy is thereby proven to be off the level of petty selfhood on the plane of the universal and true.

The human distinction above all else is power to grow, on and on, in mind and soul

and will. The climax of one vision of attainment when reached proves only the stepping-stone to new ranges beyond.

There is perfection for other orders in nature, but for man, infinite reach and potency.

This truth is one of the dynamic forces in the poems of Robert Browning; it is equally an all-pervading atmosphere in Whitman.

I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.

Each must travel for himself into this unknown. His hand points to "landscapes of continents" and to them leads "a plain country road." "There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage."

There is a thrill inexpressible in the bugle call he gives for this journey on into unmeasured accomplishment.

He lets go the past and proceeds to "fill the next fold of the future." All the past of the universe and of men is absorbed into the life of each, and in each is the promise of all to come.

This day, before dawn, I ascended a hill and looked at the crowded heaven, and I said to my spirit, When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything in them, shall we be filled and satisfied then?

And my spirit said No, we level that lift, to pass and continue beyond.

Could anything more graphically and awesomely picture the challenge which evolution throws to humanity? Grow, enlarge, it says, be and become in unresting, purposeful progress, or you go the way of the extinct species. The future—immortality—belongs to him who can triumph in new attempts unendingly.

After me, vista!
O, I see that life is not short, but immeasurably long,
I henceforth tread the world, chaste, temperate, an early
riser, a gymnast, a steady grower,
Every hour the semen of centuries—and still of cen-
turies.

The Cosmic Self



III.—The Cosmic Self

For I believed the poets. It is they
Who utter wisdom from the central deep,
And, listening to the inner flow of things,
Speak to the Ages out of Eternity.

Lowell in this voices a striking fact. The poets have been the prophets. They have, by diving deep into inmost principles, been able to see the essential meanings and purport before the fact-searching scientists could ascertain the truths coming into view, and generations before the popular mind could take hold upon their value.

Goethe, though his specific scientific work was almost worthless, outlined the general theory of evolution with a master's perspective. The mastery was, however, that of the poet, not of the scientist. Browning, in "Paracelsus," published in 1831, drew with a true artist's stroke the vast picture of evolutionary progress with a symmetry and completeness that only our own decade has verified in definite, classified fact.

The readjustment of conceptions of man and religion to new knowledge of the universe has

always been difficult. The old theory which made the earth the center of all things was deeply rooted in popular conceptions, and it required a painful upheaval to make the Copernican theory fit into theological and poetical ideals.

The evolutionary theory was even more troublesome to assimilate. It has required half a century to make even a beginning toward that end, while any full appreciation of the inspiring import of the new outlook is still far in the future.

Walt Whitman will appeal strongly to the coming generations in the new century, for they will have entered fully into the pregnant truths of nineteenth-century science.

He does not represent, with Tennyson, the transition struggle with the doubts suggested by the revolutions in cosmic knowledge. He does not with Browning force himself from his unshaken citadel of faith to search conscientiously for the dark skepticism which attacks other less fortified believers.

He has taken possession of the whole kingdom of modern truth, and is oblivious to any other land except as the home of observed life to be appreciated tenderly for the evolving beauty within it.

It is truly puzzling to tell how he gained his grasp of evolutionary conceptions. Darwin did not publish the "Origin of Species" until 1859. Spencer's first elaboration of any phase of his doctrine was published in the same year in which "Leaves of Grass" appeared. In 1852 Spencer had issued a general statement, but it seems hardly credible that Whitman could have come in contact with so obscure a book.

Nevertheless, had he been fully cognizant of every scientific fact and theory discovered or projected up to the moment of publication, his work would be quite as marvelous, so completely has the evolutionary universe become absorbed into his unconscious thought.

He is always part of an eternal process; always the product of the ages; always the result of eternal beginnings; always the channel for a limitless future.

I am an acme of things accomplished and an encloser of
things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stars,
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches be-
tween the steps,
All below duly traveled, and still I mount and mount.

In 1874 Tyndall startled even the friends of general evolution by announcing that all things

have come to be from the potent life of matter itself.

All that exists of form or thought or emotion was originally involved in the pregnant heart of the original star mist, he affirmed. Since then, theologians, as well as philosophers, have come to see that this unquestioned truth is full of beauty and divine significance.

Twenty years earlier than Tyndall's Belfast address, when any respect for matter was foreign to even scholarly thought, Whitman sprang with joyous unconsciousness into the unfamiliar current.

Afar down I see the huge first nothing—I know I was even there;

I waited unseen and always and slept through the lethargic mist,

And took my time and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.

Long I was hugged close—long and long,

Immense have been the preparations for me,

Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.

Before I was born out of my mother, generations guided me,

My embryo has never been torpid—nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb;

The long, slow strata piled to rest it on;

Vast vegetables gave it sustenance;

Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and
deposited it with care;
All forces have been steadily employed to complete and
delight me;
Now I stand on this spot with my Soul.

There is in Whitman the fullest acceptance
of science and satisfaction in "its word of
reality." But he does not wait apologetically
until science can tell him the full measure of
truth.

The scientists do an important service in an
important realm, but they do not exhaust
truth nor compass the whole of reality.

Gentlemen, I receive you, and attach and clasp hands
with you,
The facts are useful and real—they are not my dwell-
ing—I enter by them to an area of the dwelling.

His own dwelling is in life itself, not the
properties and qualities—the external details
with which science must deal.

The words of poems are the tuft and final applause of
science.

After the Copernican theory was estab-
lished, it was hard to adjust man's dignity to
his place on a little speck in the boundless
ocean of space.

The doctrine of evolution has in the same
way cowed the spirit of many and made them

feel veritable "worms of the dust" with no suggestion from theology.

There is no such transitional and forced humility in this poet. He is always conscious of the immensity of things, but the more huge the universe the more uncompassed he sees the nature of man.

I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
And all I see, multiplied as high as I can cipher, edge
but the rim of the farther systems.
My sun has his sun and round him obediently wheels,
And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest
inside them.

This vastness does not overawe the poet.

I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured, and never can be measured.
Sure as the earth swims thro' the heavens, does every one of its objects pass into spiritual results.

Whoever you are!
The divine ship sails the divine sea for you!
Whoever you are! You are he or she for whom the earth
is solid and liquid,
You are he or she for whom the sun and moon hang in
the sky.

I will confront these shows of the day and night!
I will know if I am to be less than they!
I will see if I am not as majestic as they!
I will see if I am not as subtle and real as they!
I will see if I am to be less generous than they!

There is no department of thought in which the evolutionary conception is more penetrating and vivifying than in history.

To the true historical student there is a vital sense of law and growth—a boundless sweep of cause and effect which is quite as controlling as that felt in physical science.

This “feeling for” growth and natural development in the life of humanity is of far-reaching effect. It gives birth to understanding of others, to sympathy and charity, to faith in progress, and patience with slow advance. To Whitman, with his faith in the human meaning of the whole Cosmos and the mighty purport of all mankind, the history of human development is of supreme significance.

Think of the past.

I warn you that in a little while, others will find their past in you and your times!

The race is never separated—nor man nor woman escapes,

All is inextricable—things, spirits, nature, nations, you too—from precedents you came.

But even history cannot be celebrated except as a past which has entered into the present. Social evolution is full of interest, but is seen always as a part of that marvelous composite which goes to make up you and me.

I was looking a long while for the history of the past—
And now I have found it,
It is in the present—it is this earth to-day,
It is the life of one man or one woman to-day, the average man of to-day;
It is languages, social custom, literatures, arts,
It is the broad show of artificial things; ships, machinery,
politics, creeds, modern improvements, and the interchange of nations,
All for the average man of to-day.

This, then, is the secret of Whitman's magnificent respect for each individual human being. He sees him as the incarnation and interpretation of the all of things. He sees each soul as the heir to all the wonder and might of nature and the product of all the ages of material and social progress. "The majesty and beauty of the world are latent in any iota of the world."

In his thought, which is the thought supported by all truth, the human soul may know its own life enlarged to the limitless limits of the infinite—wide as creation—a "Cosmos." The unity of all and the sanity and blessedness of all is Whitman's theism. This is his faith in God and a radiant, all vivifying faith it is!

To him a universe sound and whole to the core is a God-filled universe.

All his joy in the vast onward sweep of

creation, filled with truth and beauty, is adoration of deity. He is so far beyond the "grin and bear it" attitude of many in their acceptance of the world as science reveals it, that one can scarcely realize that it is the same order of things in which he moves.

Here is warmth, assurance, the rapt ecstacy of the cloistered devotee, and all before the universe according to Kepler and Darwin!

"Who has made hymns fit for the earth?
For I am mad with devouring ecstacy to make
hymns for the whole earth."

You, Earth and Life, till the last ray gleams, I sing.
Open mouth of my Soul, uttering gladness,
Eyes of my Soul, seeing perfection,
Natural life of me, faithfully praising things,
Corroborating forever the triumph of things.

I say Nature continues — Glory continues.
I praise with electric voice,
For I do not see one imperfection in the universe.
O setting Sun!
I still warble unto you unmitigated adoration!



The Eternal Self

IV.—The Eternal Self

I do not know what is untried and afterward,
But I know it is sure, alive, sufficient.

Whitman is a rationalist in complete degree. Authority appeals to him not at all. He is unconscious that there is a "thus saith" anywhere in heaven above or earth beneath. And yet his assurance of personal immortality is so absolute that he announces the tenets of this faith with the oracular dictum of prophet and priest.

He does not presume to specify and analyze the details of future existence. He does not mark off corner lots in the new Jerusalem and guarantee the lay of land. He contents himself with general principles which yet cover all that is essentially of worth.

Life is always seen by him with death at its side; but not as a ghastly skeleton—always as a promise and a benediction. Death to him means infinite potency—the guarantee of eternal meaning for all the events and realities of earth.

I do not know what follows the death of my body,
But I know that whatever it is, it is best for me,
And I know well that whatever is really me shall live
just as much as before.

In the light of the somber coloring always given to death in the thought of the generations, it is startling to note how Whitman draws its figure in the most brilliant colors and in his most sunny pictures.

In "A Song of Joys" he sings a pean to "the beautiful touch of death" between a carol to the trees and another to the delights of the "splash in the water" and the "race along the shore."

In the exquisite stanzas beginning "Splendor of the falling day, floating and filling me," in which he carols to the sun and "throbs to the brain and beauty of the earth" he rejoices "in the superb vistas of death." In another, celebrating fruitage, he first of all pays homage to "death (the life greater)," and lets follow upon it "seeds dropping into the ground—birth."

To turn from death as it is found in general literature to the death everywhere present in Whitman's poems is like facing suddenly westward at the time of sunset glory after having accustomed one's eyes to the pensive shades of the eastward heavens.

This triumphant assurance is not based upon elaborate arguments. All of life, all of growth, all of mystery, all of meaning, is an argument to him. If others cannot find it in these he cannot convince.

I hear you whispering there, O stars of heaven,
O suns! O grass of graves! O perpetual transfers and
promotions.

If you do not say anything, how can I say anything?

The assurance within him is inexpressible; no dictionary utterance or symbol can give it voice, but

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on.
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes
me.

Do you see, O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death—it is form—union, plan—
It is eternal life—it is happiness.

If one confronts Whitman with the difficulties attendant upon immortality, asserting that life apart from the physical body is hard to understand and mysterious, he answers with the inexplicable mystery of life. Life is mystical, but it is real. Surely death may lead to reality quite as well. There is joy and purport in life in spite of mystery and miracle; shall there not be equal joy and purport in death?

Is it wonderful that I should be immortal, as every one is
immortal?

I know it is wonderful—but
Come! I should like to hear you tell me what there is in
yourself that is not just as wonderful.
And I should like to hear the name of anything between
First-Day morning and Seventh-Day night
That is not just as wonderful.

To him the unthinkable thing would be that
man could have come into being with all the
marvelous, mighty past incarnated in his
nature, capable of living in all, enjoying all,
entering into the vast eternal stretch of things,
and then be snuffed out just when he is begin-
ning to give out the infinite potency within
him.

No one who appreciates the human soul, as
we have previously seen that Whitman does,
could fail to have unlimited confidence in its
permanence and eternal meaning.

To him, immortality is never the misty,
ocean-absorbed conception of many who have
been nursed upon eastern nirvana or western
conservation of energy notions.

Eternal life to Whitman is the vigorous per-
sonal existence of a clear-cut identity.

You are not thrown to the winds—you gather certainly
and safely around yourself,
Yourself! Yourself! Yourself, forever and ever!

The soul, as Whitman knows it to be, is its own answer to all doubts. Once in existence, eternity is its destiny.

It is enough, O soul,
O soul, we have positively appeared — that is enough.

The love of life and all things mundane is so strong in this poet that he is almost jealously fearful that he will seem to be depreciating this life when rejoicing in the promise of further existence. He knows he shall visit the stars, that present experiences will prove only one out of myriad experiences, but he expects to find nowhere anything

More majestic and beautiful than I have already found
on the earth.

He has no doubt but the new house he will inhabit will be good, but he is quite in love with the studs and rafters of this one, which has grown part of him.

However, in the poem, "Night on the Prairies," he reconsiders his hesitancy to affirm greater things to come.

In the open, looking at the stars, it all bursts upon him anew and he sees how infinite and inconceivable are the experiences yet ahead.

Now I absorb immortality and peace.
I admire death and test propositions.
I was thinking the day most splendid till I saw what the
not-day exhibited,
I was thinking this globe enough, till there trembled
upon me myriads of other globes,
O, how plainly I see now that life cannot exhibit all to
me — as the day cannot,
O, I see that I am to wait for what will be exhibited by
death.

The body occupies a position of dignity and significance in Whitman's philosophy.

Without the material body he feels the personal identity could never have reached perfection. The soul receives "identity through materials," the "temporary use of materials for identity's sake" are expressions characteristic of many.

Physical birth, he says, "is to identify you. It is not that you should be undecided, but decided."

It is not strange, then, that he believes strongly in a spiritual body which is now present in the physical form and which will continue to give the promoted soul a habitation and identity.

I do not doubt that from under the feet and beside the hands and face I am cognizant of, are now looking faces I am not cognizant of — calm and actual faces.

I do not doubt that interiors have their interiors and exteriors have their exteriors—and that the eyesight has another eyesight, and the hearing another hearing, and the voice another voice.

O, what is proved to me this day beyond cavil, that it is not my material eyes which finally see
Nor my material body which finally lives, walks, laughs, embraces, procreates.

After speaking of the discharge of his "voided body" at death, he suggests:

My real body doubtless left to me for other spheres.

The future toward which Whitman's stimulating bugle is calling us is a virile, purposeful one. There is no inane, negative monotony in his thought, nor cowardly quiescence.

Muscle and pluck forever!
What invigorates life invigorates death,
And the dead advance as much as the living advance,
And the future is no more uncertain than the present.

In "Song of Prudence" is as noble an assertion of true value as could be penned. The prudence which has to do with getting and having, with appearance and indirection—drops quietly aside "from the prudence which suits immortality," "charity and personal force are the only investments worth anything."

No specification is necessary; all that a male or female does, that is vigorous, benevolent, clean, is so

much profit to him or her, in the unshakable order of the universe, and through the whole scope of it forever.

It is only rarely that there is in these poems any recognition that any one can or does doubt. When there is, the suggestion is tossed aside with ironical denial.

Do you suspect death? If I were to suspect death,
I should die now;
Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well suited
toward annihilation?

Again he affirms, as if in half sarcastic reference to the attitude of others, that the purport of us here is "not a speculation, or a bonmot, or reconnaissance" that may by good luck turn out well or may be retracted under certain contingencies.

The secret of this absorbing, all-conquering confidence lies in his confidence in the all of things—in the divine inherency—in God.

There is little here which even suggests a hard and fast plan by an outside, throne-occupying deity—but everything to show how the poet's sense of a God-filled Cosmos permeates his every other ideal and belief.

In this faith in an All Good he cannot leave out any atom of humanity from the ultimate triumph.

Immortality is for the least as for the great-

est. "Each is considered. Not a single one can it fail"—not the young man, or young woman.

Not the little child that peeped in at the door, and then drew back, and was never seen again, nor the old man who has lived without purpose, and feels it with bitterness worse than gall.

. . . Not the least wisp that is known.

And all of "these least" must arrive at the highest sometime. A few giant souls will not content Walt Whitman, all must come sometime to the same estate. "We must have the indestructible breed of the best, regardless of time."

A faith in immortality grounded in a universe pure gold all through, reinforced by unquestioned and valiant loyalty to human nature in every aspect, rests upon bedrock. With this foundation we cannot wonder at the jubilant affirmation closing the poem, "To Think of Time,"

 I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous
float is for it, and the cohering is for it!
And all preparation is for it, and identity is for it, and
life and death are altogether for it.



“Even These Least”

V.—“Even These Least”

I do not ask who you are—that is not important to me—
You can do nothing, and be nothing, but what I will
enfold you.

Recall Christ, brother of rejected persons—brother
of slaves, felons, idiots, and of insane and diseased
persons.

Whitman has been the most misunderstood man in literature. With Puritanic self-confidence, respectable society decided instanter that it would have none of him. What mercy could one expect who would calmly announce himself as not only the poet of goodness, but the poet of wickedness as well? X

He affirms of himself all sorts of crime, vice, and contemptible traits, but it is with the same unrelenting readiness with which he asserts his equality with potentates and seers, with saints and gods; and the one attitude no more indicates vaunting depravity than the other reveals absurd egotism.

He is contending for race unity, for the “vast similitude” that interlocks all, and does not flinch when he finds wrong and folly and misery a part of the great whole.

He accepts the earth as he finds it and is bound to see that it is good.

My gait is no fault-finder's or rejector's gait;
I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

He will not accept anything which all may not possess, even self-imputed virtue. He feels that through him all the "long dumb voices" may find expression. Slaves, prostitutes, deformed persons, the diseased and despairing, thieves and dwarfs, all find in him the sympathetic interpreter.

In all the "new thought" atmosphere, nothing is really newer than the attitude it is helping to secure toward wrong doing. True, it is no newer than the Judean teachings of one who is supposed to be the teacher of Christendom, but it is new nevertheless.

Walt Whitman startles by the unfaltering utterance which he gave two score years ago to a charity, which we are with hesitancy feebly trying for to-day.

Phariseeism has been a cultivated virtue so long that it takes away one's breath to find a man who thanks the Lord so fervently that he *is* as other men are, and with studied elaboration gives us long categories of his sins, so that we may have no doubt that he knows whereof he speaks! As a matter of fact,

everyone who knew Walt Whitman throughout his life believed him to be more nearly clean and noble in all thought and conduct than any but the very few. And yet in his capacity as the representative of each and all he stoutly asserts:

I own that I have been sly, thievish, mean, a prevaricator, greedy, derelict;
And I own that I remain so yet.
You felons on trial in courts;
You convicts in prison cells — you sentenced assassins,
chained and handcuffed with iron,
Who am I, that I am not on trial, or in prison?
Me, ruthless and devilish as any, that my wrists are not
chained with iron, or my ankles with iron?

This abounding sympathy and freedom from Pharisaic judgment is not based upon any failure to appreciate the distinction between the good and the evil.

He loves the good with a natural spontaneity and sees so clearly the rich returns brought by the high, clean life that he can have only a commiserating tenderness for any whose unfortunate blindness has made them go wrong.

He no more judges harshly the victim of moral blindness than of bodily disease. The same laws by which insight has finally come to the righteous will lead each stumbling one into clearer light.

The difference between sin and goodness is no delusion, he affirms, and the difference lies in no artificial mandate, but is the difference between joy and misery, between sweetness and gall.

I say what tastes sweet to the most perfect person; that is finally right.

Two poems, "Kosmos," or "Gods," and "A Hand Mirror," are placed side by side in "Leaves of Grass" with no suggestion that they are related to each other. "Gods" pictures a full-grown soul, vigorous to be and to do—able to enter into the joys and faiths of all the universe. "A Hand Mirror" holds the glass up to one who has burnt out the gold of life.

Outside fair costume, within ashes and filth.

The ashes and filth are mirrored with a horrible realism, closing with no sermon, only—

Such a result so soon; and from such a beginning!

This clear-eyed knowledge of the full blackness of the night of wrong does not make him any the less confident when he urges courage and faith upon its victims. No one can sink so low as to be out of reach of his extended hand and cheery call.

The mockeries are not you;
Underneath them, and within them, I see you lurk;
I pursue you where none else has pursued you:

The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion; if these balk others, they do not balk me; The pert apparel, the deformed attitude, drunkenness, greed, premature death; all these I part aside; I track through your windings and turnings; I come upon you where you thought eye should never come upon you.

Then he assures them that the best the human soul can attain is theirs.

As for me, I give nothing to anyone, except I give the like carefully to you; I sing the songs of the glory of none, not God, sooner than I sing the glory of you.

A saving power for these lies in the persons who can see the real man “behind and through” the “greasy and pimpled” exterior. Let a man “of perfect blood” come in contact with the “insulter, the angry person,” he “strangely transmutes them.” “They hardly know themselves, they are so clean.”

The puzzling “Problem of Evil” is faced by Whitman with no shirking.

I sit and look out upon the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame. All these—all meanness and agony without end—I sitting, look out upon, See, hear, and am silent.

But he promptly reasserts his faith that it will all be right in some way. “Nothing fails its perfect return.”

O me, man of slack faith so long!
Standing aloof — denying portions so long;
Me, with mole's eyes, unrisen to buoyancy and vision —
unfree.

When he sees with full horizon he knows
that in an evolving humanity, there must be
half development, crude outcroppings.

He learns to think of the "diseased and
despairing, of thieves and dwarfs" as among

Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
And of the threads that connect the stars—and of wombs,
and of the fatherstuff.

The character dwarfs are simply later in the
process, but all shall "flow and unite." The
universe is in order, although part is further
advanced than others. The "twisted skull
waits, and the watery or rotten blood waits,"
but all these "far behind are to go on in their
turn."

The atheism or theism of recent times has
left the question of origins. The believers
and unbelievers may be known, not by their
opinion as to how the universe was created,
but by their answer to the questions. What
kind of a universe is it? Are there rotten
places in it? Has the good any eternal, in-
trinsic meaning at the heart of things? It is

by this test that Whitman is found among the most devout and doubt-free theists. He has no faintest question but that all is essentially sound and sane throughout every atom of the Cosmos.

There is perfection in final results, if not in details of the process. Wherever there is disease, there is healing.

Amelioration is one of the earth's words;
The earth neither lags nor hastens;
It has all attributes, growths, effects—latent in itself from
the jump.

“The purifying chemistry of nature” might well be the title of one of the “Leaves.” In this he is, at first, startled by the earth—thinking suddenly of the disease and death which has been buried in it. How can there be health even in the roots of spring? The earth is a veritable mass of horrible decay.

Yet, behold!
The grass covers the prairies;
The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the
garden;
The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward;
The apple buds cluster together on the apple branches.
The summer growth is innocent and disdainful above
all those strata of sour dead;
What chemistry!
That all is clean forever and ever!

Facing frankly all appearances, all facts, this prophet-poet sounds exultantly the pean of jubilation: All is good, all is beauty, all is health and sanity.

I do not doubt that whatever can possibly happen, anywhere, at any time, is provided for, in the inherences of things.

The Larger Woman



VI.—The Larger Woman

Daughters of the Land, did you wait for your poet?
Anticipate the best women;
I say an unnumbered new race of hardy and well-defined
 women are to spread through all These States.
I say a girl fit for These States must be free, capable,
dauntless, just the same as a boy.

Whitman's thorough-going modernness and adherence to the laws of nature and freedom seem to have no limitations. In many teachers we revel in a progressive outlook until we run full tilt upon some wall of conservatism—some rock of retarded development which checks enthusiasm and puts up the guards of caution. He at times violates our instincts of taste, to many noble sentiments he gives no response, but his shortcomings do not lie in the stereotyped or tradition-bound.

He may not see all that there is in the world, but what he sees is always real—never the phantom arbitrarily created by custom or popular opinion.

In his attitude toward woman, Whitman well illustrates his prophetic instinct. Writ-

ing in the middle of the century, he preceded the agitation for woman's educational, industrial, and political opportunities. Yet he took all this for granted and leaped past the transitional, halting stages to an ideal of strength, freedom, human achievement, and matronly supremacy such as another century will understand better than our own.

It is not in woman's name that Whitman demands that bars be withdrawn and cages removed. It is in the name of humanity.

The race of human creatures are destined to match the majesty of the universe. In humankind, all past evolution finds its culmination—all the cosmic order awaits its fruition.

The mothers of the race must inaugurate the uplift of the race.

The women of the race must live out their full portion of this mighty destiny. Sacrifice, dwarfing, and hampered growth are not necessary anywhere in the order of things—every life may be lived out to the full—must be so fulfilled, if the child of that life is not to be defrauded.

In the name of that maternity by which woman's life has been supposed to receive its limitation, the poet proclaims the obliteration of all limits.

The following poem gives all the deeper meaning of this time of woman's prophetic beginnings of growth:

Unfolded out of the folds of the woman man comes unfolded, and is always to come unfolded,
Unfolded only out of the superbest woman of the earth is to come the superbest man of the earth,
Unfolded only out of the friendliest woman is to come the friendliest man,
Unfolded only out of the perfect body of a woman can a man be form'd of perfect body,
Unfolded only out of the imitable poem of the woman can come the poems of man,
Unfolded out of the folds of the woman's brain come all the folds of the man's brain, duly obedient,
Unfolded out of the justice of woman all justice is unfolded,
Unfolded out of the sympathy of the woman is all sympathy;
A man is a great thing upon the earth, and through eternity—but every jot of the greatness of man is unfolded out of woman;
First the man is shaped in the woman, he can then be shaped in himself.

It is inevitable, then, that Whitman should delight, not in feminine, but in great human qualities in woman.

Her equality with man might better have been taken for granted than frequently reiterated in specific terms, as he does, but perhaps he could not be too definite on that point at the time he wrote:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of
men.

No separated passages can give adequate idea of the fine, vigorous ideal of womanhood which the poet everywhere suggests. Woman is included in every appeal—the double pronoun is always used. His call to valiant self-assertion is the human call, never the masculine alone.

The sturdy strength of mind and body he delights in for all.

Sometimes, however, he gives a special reference to woman's world-wide activity. Among the things he delights in is:

The athletic American matron speaking in public to crowds of listeners.

In picturing his ideal city, among many suggestions spiritual and political, he speaks of this community as one

Where women walk in public processions in the streets,
the same as the men,

Where they enter the public assembly and take places
the same as the men, and are appealed to by the
orators the same as the men,

Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands,

Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands,

Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands,

Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,

There the greatest city stands.

It is not strange that, with his passion for the organic forces and underlying potencies of things, Whitman should see woman as the mother more often than in any capacity except in her supreme function as a human entity.

The romantic sentiment is wholly lacking in his poems, and there is very little to indicate appreciation of the sweeter phases of domestic sentiment, but universal natural functions appeal to him powerfully. The mother he most often thinks of, however, is the elderly woman. The years when motherhood means most to woman herself—the years when baby hands press moist fingers upon the pulsing breast, and little feet toddle into strong, young arms—is not often reflected in these poems.

Perhaps it is because Whitman's own mother was the object of such reverent admiration to him, that age and motherhood are framed together in his pictures.

The old face of the mother of many children!

Whist! I am fully content.

Behold a woman!

She looks out from her paper cap—her face is clearer
and more beautiful than the sky.

She sits in an arm chair under the shaded porch of the
farm house,

The sun just shines on her old white head.

Her ample gown is of cream-hued linen,
Her grandsons raised the flax, and her granddaughters
spun it with the distaff and the wheel.
The melodious character of the earth,
The finish beyond which philosophy cannot go, and does
not wish to go.
The justified mother of men.

The "eternal womanly" appeals to this man
no less because of his universal ideal of "the
human creature of the mother sex."

Think of womanhood, and you to be a woman;
The creation is womanhood,
Have I not said that womanhood involves all?
Have I not told how the universe has nothing better than
the best womanhood?

The stanza opening "Her shape arises" pictures a womanly presence passing amid grossness and crime. She does not go in ignorance and shallow innocence, but with clear-sighted knowledge of all the world holds of evil and temptation. She does not draw away her skirts. She knows the wrong, but "she is none the less considerate or friendly therefore." Her mere presence excites the love of these supposedly depraved ones. "She is the best beloved—it is without exception—she has no reason to fear, and she does not fear." All that a lesser woman would shrink from does not offend her. "She is possessed of herself."

She receives them as the laws of nature receive them—
she is strong,
She, too, is a law of nature—there is no law stronger
than she is.

The supreme message of Whitman can have no sex limitations. Health and freedom, vigor and courage, these are a challenge to all alike. But since there has been, and still is, more of conventional barriers about women than men, woman peculiarly needs his distinctive spur. In the "Song of the Open Road" one listens to an awe-inspiring, joy-stirring appeal to men and women to live in the real and the spontaneous.

The road always traveled and by all men is hallowed and beautiful if one learns of it "the profound lesson of reception, neither preference nor denial," but one must be ready to leave it, when the personal mandate comes, into bypaths or into more far-carrying, new-blazed roads.

O highway I travel! O public road! Do you say to me,
"Do not leave me?"
Do you say, "Venture not; if you leave me you are lost?"
Do you say, "I am already prepared—I am well-beaten
and undenied—adhere to me?"
O public road! I say back, "I am not afraid to leave
you—yet I love you."

This reverence for the past, although he does not hesitate to defy its dictates, is character-

istic of Whitman always. Tender of old customs which were needed, reverential of precedent and appreciative of established beauty he yet must make his own advance in his own way—

However sweet these laid-up stores—however convenient this dwelling, we cannot remain here,
However sheltered this port, and however calm these waters, we must not anchor here.

Then more forcible and alluring, because we know it springs from no shallow undervaluation of the old, comes this bugle call to the new :

Allons! The inducements shall be great to you;
We will sail pathless and wild seas,
We will go where winds blow, waves dash, and the Yankee clipper speeds by under full sail.
Allons! With power, liberty, the earth, the elements!
Health, defiance, gaiety, self-esteem, curiosity;
Let us go from all formulas!
Allons! Yet take warning!
He traveling with me needs the best blood, strews endurance,
None may come back to the trial, till he or she bring courage and health.

Mere newness is not the test of the new paths. The way must lead to real results in character. The soul and its needs must never be forgotten. The test is always here.

Allons! After the Great Companions, and to belong to them!

They, too, are on the road! They are the swift and majestic men! They are the greatest women!

Of the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand road of the universe, all other progress is the needed emblem and sustenance.

Forever alive, forever forward,
Stately, solemn, sad, withdrawn, baffled, mad, turbulent,
feeble, dissatisfied,
Desperate, proud, fond, sick, accepted of men, rejected
of men.

They go! They go! I know that they go, but I know not
where they go,
But I know that they go toward the best—toward some-
thing great.



The Larger Man

VII.—The Larger Man

I announce a great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste,
affectionate, compassionate, fully armed.

I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold.

Not to chisel ornaments,
But to chisel with free stroke the heads and limbs of
plenteous supreme gods, that The States may
realize them walking and talking.

Think of manhood, and you to be a man;
Do you count manhood and the sweets of manhood
nothing?

Whitman “promulges” (a favorite word with him) an ideal of manhood no less than of womanhood. Many ideals are so far removed from the practical real that one can recognize no relationship between them. Whitman, however, while the divinest possibilities are not too exalted to have place in his ideal, drives the foundation piles so deep in the solid ground of robust, physical energy and hardy, full-blooded activity that one can believe in the substantial character of any superstructure he cares to erect upon such a foundation.

He exalts the body and all that suggests its

highest vigor. He adores man, the animal, before he does homage to man, the thinker, or man, the spiritual conqueror.

Primitive roughness is more to him than the veneer of the exquisite dandy.

Washes and razors for foofoos—for me freckles and the bristling beard.

He wants that man should inure himself to "run, leap, swim, wrestle, fight—to stand the heat or cold—to take good aim with a gun—to sail a boat—manage horses—to beget superb children—to speak readily and clearly—to feel at home among common people—to hold his own in terrible positions on land and sea."

Not for an embroiderer. (There will always be plenty of embroiderers. I welcome them also.)

But for the fiber of things, and for inherent men and women.

Browning frequently shows this exquisite realization of health. With Whitman it is fundamental.

If anything is sacred, the human body is sacred.

And the glory and sweet of a man, is the token of manhood untainted.

And in man or woman, a clean, strong, firm-fibered body, is beautiful as the most beautiful face.

The following is his conception of man as he should be in native qualities:

His shape arises.

Arrogant, masculine, naive, rowdyish,
Laugher, weeper, worker, idler, citizen, countryman,
Saunterer of woods, stander upon hills, summer swimmer
 in rivers or by the sea.

Of pure American breed, of reckless health, his body
 free from taint from top to toe, free forever from
 headache and dyspepsia, clean-breathed,
Ample-limbed, a good feeder, weight a hundred and
 eighty pounds, full-blooded, six feet high, forty
 inches around the breast and back.

Countenance sun-burnt, bearded, calm, unrefined.

Reminder of animals, meeter of savage and gentlemen
 on equal terms.

Attitudes lithe and erect, costume free, neck gray and
 open, of slow movement on foot.

Passer of his right arm 'round the shoulders of his
 friends, companions of the streets.

Persuader always of people to give him their sweetest
 touches, never their meanest.

A Manhattanese bred, fond of Brooklyn, fond of Broadway,
 fond of the life of the wharfs and the great ferries.

Enterer everywhere, welcomed everywhere, easily under-
 stood after all,

Never offering others, always offering himself.

Surely when an ideal of high character is
grounded upon such sturdy, wholesome manli-
ness it will not appear so illusory and unreal
as do many visions of perfection.

Walt Whitman draws the man he seeks as
fit for "These States," in magnificent out-
line, but even the most exalted traits are filled
in with such human shading that we forget

that it is an ideal and not any prosaic individual with whom we daily touch elbows.

The impression gained by the many eulogies of the rough and unrefined would be misleading alone. It is the genuineness he insists upon, and loves honest coarseness rather than an artificial coating of insincere polish.

The refinement which comes from gentleness of feeling and spontaneous good will he values supremely. "Behavior" is his favorite word for this natural outshowing of the true man or woman.

Behavior—fresh, native, copious, each one for himself or herself.

Nature and the Soul expressed—
America and freedom expressed—

In it the finest art.

In it pride, cleanliness, sympathy to have their chance.
In it physique, intellect, faith—in it just as much as to manage an army or a city, or to write a book—perhaps more.

The youth, the laboring person, the poor person, rivaling all the rest—perhaps outdoing the rest.

The effects of the universe no greater than its;
For there is nothing in the whole universe that can be more effective than a man's or woman's daily behavior can be,

In any position, in any one of these states.

There is little in this to help out a catechism upon the rules of etiquette, but a sufficient

statement of great principles to found a school of expression—indeed, an entire system of education fit for the unfolding centuries.

The wider selfhood is the inclusive outline of his conception of human character.

As we have previously seen, this taking into himself of all things, all men, all experiences, is the key to this poet's characteristic work. He believes it the ground work of all large life. Two poems are specifically an expression of this conviction.

In the poem "Him All Wait For" or "Song of the Answerer," more than all other qualities is emphasized this of all-embracing absorption. "Every existence has its idiom," which he translates into his own tongue. All divergences which seem to contradict, "he sees how they join."

He says indifferently and alike, "How are you, friend?"
to the president at his levee,
And he says, "Good day, my brother," to Cudge that
hoes in the sugar field.
And both understand him, and know that his speech is
right.

Every one, no matter what his occupation, believes he is of the same calling—authors, laborers, sailors, soldiers—each group feels

that he belongs to them. All nationalities also claim him as their own—

The English believe he comes of their English stock.
A Jew to the Jew he seems—a Russ to the Russ—usual and near, removed from none.

In "Salut au Monde" he travels by electric flights over all the world—one of those "cataloguing" tours to which the casual reader so much objects. He mentions a world full of people in all nations and all times, past, present, and future—takes them all into his interest and sympathy, and lumps all whom he may have overlooked in a specific codicil:

All you continentals of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia,
indifferent of place;
And you on the numberless islands of the archipelagoes
of the sea!
And you of centuries hence, when you listen to me!
And you each and everywhere, whom I specify not, but
include just the same!
Health to you! Good will to you all, from me and
America sent,
For we acknowledge you all and each.

He does not want anyone to imagine that he is thus saluting only the interesting, dignified, or picturesque. The "Hottentot, with clicking palate," "woolly-haired hordes," the "Austral negro, naked, red, sooty, with protrusive lip, groveling"—all these and many

more as discouraging, are counted in ("they will come forward in due time to my side"), and still he can affirm:

My spirit has passed in compassion and determination
around the whole earth.

I have looked for lovers and equals and found them
ready for me in all lands;
I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them.

The great man must first take all creation
into his nature, and then make that creation
glorious by his personal worth.

Here is realization.

Here is a man tallied—he realizes here what he has in
him.

The animals, the past, the future, light, space, majesty,
love, if they are vacant of you, you are vacant
of them.

The first condition of making this all-inclusive life glorious is valiant self-reliance. Man must receive the universe, but he must himself be the center of that universe.

He may not look about him to learn the truth, to receive commands, to find satisfaction. These must be found in himself. He must feel that he is the focal center for the eternal law and potency. Anxiety for recognition, for immediate results, for conformity, are quite apart from such a spirit.

The Larger Man

The larger humanity is the be all and end all of this poet's philosophy. He not only yearns for it, but believes in it. A "hundred million of superb persons will yet walk through these states." "The rest"—all other interests and existence—"part away for superb persons and contribute to them."

All waits or goes by default, till a strong being appears;
A strong being is the proof of the race, and of the ability
of the universe.

Youth, Maturity, Age

VIII.—Youth, Maturity, Age

Youth, large, lusty, loving—youth full of grace, force, fascination!

Do you know that Old Age may come after you with equal grace, force, fascination?

Day full-blown and splendid—day of the immense sun, action, ambition, laughter;

The Night follows close with millions of suns, and sleep, and restoring darkness.

In the discussion of the larger man it was impossible to go into many phases, too full of helpful suggestion to be omitted. Continuing the same subject, it may be well to give it the age color Whitman so often beautifully lends to his human references.

Youth is rarely pictured in itself. Usually it is seen as a prophecy, or as typical of the future with its promise:

O tan-faced prairie boy,
Before you came to camp, came many a welcome gift;
Praises and presents came and nourishing food, till at last among the recruits
You came, taciturn, with nothing to give—we looked on each other,
When lo! more than all the gifts of the world you gave me.

Naturally, the robust, physical life which Whitman values pre-eminently in maturity is

a part of his ideal of youth. The same genuine spontaneity is requisite for the boy—a spontaneity from which springs a morality finer than obedience to arbitrary dictation from any source could secure:

The boy I love—the same becomes a man—not through
derived power, but in his own right;
Wicked, rather than virtuous, out of conformity and fear;
Fond of his sweetheart—relishing well his steak—
Unrequited love, or a slight, cutting him worse than
a wound cuts;
First rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's eye, to sail
a skiff, to sing a song, or play on the banjo,
Preferring scars, and faces pitted with small-pox, over
all latherers, and those who keep out of the sun.

Whitman's charity and hearty good-will for the morally unfortunate is only equaled by his yearning solicitude for youth that it should not lose its way.

In one of his poems he addresses "You just maturing youth," and urges him to remember many things which will tend to make him keep his manhood unsullied. There is no direct moralizing—only a series of suggestions of inspiration and caution.

He reminds him of the wonderful heritage each youth possesses in this country with its history; of its high destiny and the copious humanity streaming from every direction

toward America; of the national hospitality he must promote; of the freedom and absolute equality he must guard; of the great multitude of the future for whom he must keep all institutions noble.

Anticipate your own life—retract with merciless power,
Shrink nothing—retract in time—do you see those errors,
weaknesses, lies, thefts?

Think of the Soul;
I swear to you that body of yours gives proportions to
your Soul somehow to live in other spheres;
I do not know how, but I know it is so.

Think of loving and being loved;
Think of spiritual results,
Sure as the earth swims through the heavens, does every
one of its objects pass into spiritual results.

Interwoven thus are all sorts of incentives
for the high life of cleanliness and large
motive.

National pride, race responsibility, physical
safety, reverence for woman and for love, the
stimulus of heroes, responsibility for the soul's
eternal perfecting, are all marshaled to aid the
youth in his conquest over the unworthy.

He speaks of the mission of poetry as being
“to fill man with a vigorous and clean manli-
ness, religiousness, and give him good heart as

a radical possession and habit." He himself certainly strives to that end.

It is difficult to separate special character elements from poems, all of which are filled with life motives and ideals—human interests and characteristics.

Whitman could not conceive noble character indifferent to matters of country and humanity. His thought of America will be later discussed. This is his most intense passion—the love of the aggregate in the national life—and hence his conception of fully matured manhood has in it much of patriotism.

The highest for each and all in the corporate life—to live more nobly, that all may inherit greater nobleness, should be man's deep-lying aspiration.

Great is the English brood. What brood has so vast
a destiny as the English?
It is the mother of the brood that must rule the earth
with the new rule.
The new rule shall rule as the Soul rules; and as the
love, justice, equality in the Soul, rule.

Love of truth as an element of character takes on a different angle in Whitman than is given it elsewhere. Love of some abstract and exalted truth is too often made an excuse for indifference to prosaic facts. The truth

lies in all things as they exist, if one is wise enough to see it, and nothing can hide it but cynicism and indifference.

Great is the quality of Truth in man;
The quality of truth in man supports itself through all changes;
It is inevitable in the man; he and it are in love, and never leave each other.
The Truth in man is no dictum, it is vital as eyesight.
If there be any Soul, there is truth—if there be any man or woman, there is truth—if there be physical or moral, there is truth;
If there be equilibrium or volition, there is truth—if there be things at all upon the earth, there is truth.
O truth of the earth! O truth of things! I am determined to press my way toward you.
Sound your voice! I scale mountains, or dive in the sea after you.

As a rule, Whitman lays little stress upon mental power. If separated from energy for practical affairs or human sympathy he would care little for intellectual attainment, and so at times he seems to undervalue it.

Consistency does not trouble him, however, for he includes "multitude," and before he makes full circuit he embraces many sides of the truth.

I have said many times that materials and the Soul are great, and that all depends on physique;
Now I reverse what I said, and affirm that all depends on the æsthetic or intellectual,

And that criticism is great—and that refinement is greatest of all;
And I affirm now that mind governs—and that all depends on the mind.

For definitely expressed aspiration, after specific character attainments, the poem named in the later editions "Excelsior" stands alone.

Who has gone farthest? for I would go farther.
And who has been just? for I would be the most just person on the earth.
And who most cautious? for I would be more cautious.
And who has been happiest? O, I think it is I—I think no one was ever happier than I.
And who has lavished all? for I lavish constantly the best I have.
And who proudest? for I think I have reason to be the proudest son alive—for I am the son of the brawny and tall-topt city.
And who has been bold and true? for I would be the boldest and truest being in the universe.
And who benevolent? for I would show more benevolence than all the rest.
And who has received the love of the most friends? for I know what it is to receive the passionate love of many friends.
And who possesses a perfect and enamored body? for I do not believe anyone possesses a more perfect or enamored body than mine;
And who thinks the amplest thoughts? for I would surround those thoughts.
And who has made hymns fit for the earth? for I am mad with devouring ecstasy to make joyous hymns for the whole earth.

Surely, by this time, no one can think of this as egotism of the petty sort. The strongest conviction of the poet is that such self-exaltation is the hope of the race and peculiarly needed by the people of a democratic nation, resting, as it does, on the individual sanctity of each.

So long!

I announce an old age that shall lightly and joyfully meet its translation.

Nothing is more unique in Whitman than his delight in old age, save his eulogy of death, to which it is akin.

He sees in Old Age "the estuary that enlarges and spreads itself grandly as it pours in the great sea."

He has for age also the expectation of an athletic strength and enthusiasm.

In "Children of Adam" he describes a great-grandfather "of wonderful vigor, calmness, and beauty of person. The shape of his head, the richness and breadth of his manners, the pale yellow and white of his hair and beard, and the immeasurable meaning of his black eyes."

This man of eighty years was six feet tall—"the blood showed like scarlet through the clear brown of his skin."

When he went with his five sons and many grandsons to hunt or fish, you would pick him out as the most beautiful and vigorous of the gang.

There is ever a sense of the sublime and steadfast in the old age so tenderly and reverently exalted in these poems. An atmosphere as of the heights of the conqueror, but it is never a final thing; always above and beyond it lie the illimitable spaces of eternal progress.

O, the old manhood of me, my joy!
My children and grandchildren — my white hair and beard —
My largeness, calmness, majesty, out of the long stretch of my life.

And again he describes the "Journeymen" and among them:

Old Age, calm, expanded, broad with the haughty breath of the universe;
Old Age, flowing free with the delicious near-by freedom of death.

In the "Song at Sunset," a poem whose poetic quality is peculiarly exquisite, we find this summary:

Good in all,
In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals,
In the annual return of the seasons,
In the hilarity of youth,
In the strength and flush of manhood,
In the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age,
In the superb vistas of death.

Unity with Nature



IX.—Unity with Nature

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he be-
came,
And that object became part of him for the day or a
certain part of the day,
Or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.

The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning glories and white
and red clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird,
And the third-month lambs and the sow's pink-faint
litter, and the mare's foal and the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barnyard or by the mire of
the pondside,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below
there, and the beautiful curious liquid,
And the water plants, with their graceful flat heads, all
became part of him.

It is a surprise to the student of Walt Whitman to find that with all his unusual interests, he is perhaps most excellent, after all, in the realm common to poets generally—the description and interpretation of nature.

Mere admiration of natural beauty does not satisfy. All the world about in its every aspect, he believes is unconsciously absorbed

and assimilated into each life from the earliest moments and later should be consciously received into the inmost soul as a large part of its richest experience.

It seems scarcely possible that even Wordsworth's word brush has painted more exquisite pictures of nature's life and growth, color and sound than Whitman has left us.

His words in these pictures are chosen with rare originality and perfect discrimination. But even in the abundance of his nature work, man is never forgotten. The human soul is always the center. It is nature as man sees it—nature as it reacts in spiritual interpretation—never nature for itself alone.

Before the fitting man all Nature yields.

This extract from the "Song of Myself," though less beautiful than many of his later passages, is unique and inspiring:

To behold the daybreak—
The little light fades the immense and diaphanous
shadows.
The air tastes good to my palate;
Hefts of the moving world at innocent gambols silently
rising, freshly exuding,
Scooting obliquely high and low.
Something I can not see puts upward libidinous prongs;
Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven.

Dazzling and tremendous, how quick the sun-rise would
kill me,
If I could not now and always send the sun-rise out of me.
We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun;
We found our own, O my soul, in the calm and cool of
the daybreak.

The sun is a favorite object of his adoration.
He invokes it thus in the opening of a series
of his later poems:

Thou orb aloft full dazzling! thou hot October sun!
Flooding with sheeny light the gray beach sand,
The sibilant near sea with vistas far and foam,
And tawny streaks and shades and spreading blue;
O sun of noon, resplendent! my special word to thee,

Thou that with fructifying heat and light,
O'er myriad farms, o'er lands and waters, North and
South,
O'er all the globe that turns its face to thee shining in
space;
Thou that impartially infoldest all, not only continents,
seas;
Thou that to grapes and weeds and little wild flowers
givest so liberally,
Shed, shed thyself on mine and me, with but a fleeting
ray out of thy million millions.
Strike through these chants,
Nor only launch thy subtle dazzle and thy strength for
these.
Prepare the later afternoon of me myself— prepare my
lengthening shadows,
Prepare my starry nights.

The night is full of suggestion and promise to the poet as well as the sun. To him, it is a sacred prophecy of that illimitable potency men call death. Its mystery, its star-filled immensity, its brooding, nourishing power all enter frequently into his thought.

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night;
I call to the earth and sea, half held by the Night.
Press close, bare-bosomed Night!
Press close, magnetic, nourishing Night!
Night of the south winds! Night of the large few stars!
Still, nodding Night! Mad, naked summer Night.

This passage continues with an apostrophe to the earth in the moonlight, which is surely passionate in its beauty.

Smile, O voluptuous, cool-breathed Earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of the departed sunset! Earth of the mountain's
misty top!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon, just tinged
with blue!
Earth of the shine and dark, mottling the tide of the
rivers!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds, brighter and clearer
for my sake!
Far-swooping elbowed Earth! Rich, apple-blossomed
Earth!
Smile, for Your Lover comes!

The sea is an endless source of wonder, delight, and suggestion. It even staggers and humbles him at times.

I, too, but signify, at the utmost, a little washed-up drift.
Oppressed with myself that I have dared to open my
mouth.

I perceive Nature here in sight of the sea, is taking ad-
vantage of me, to dart³ upon me, and sting me,
Because I am assuming so much,
And because I have dared to open my mouth to sing
at all.

He is in despair at want of power to find
“the secret of the wondrous murmuring” he
envies, but finally asserts:

Sea-raff! crook-tongued waves!
O, I will yet sing, some day, what you have said to me.

The following passage is regarded by Symonds as of a fine poetic quality. It cer-
tainly says much in little and the few lines
which express the experience of the ocean
swimmer are full of satisfaction to one who
has known that keenest physical delight.

Yon Sea! I resign myself to you also—I guess what you
mean,
I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me;
We must have a turn together—I undress, hurry me out
of sight of the land,
Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
Dash me with amorous⁴ wet—I can repay you.
Sea of stretched ground swells!
Sea breathing broad, convulsive breaths!
Sea of the brine of life! Sea of unshoveled yet always
ready graves!

X
Howler and scooper of storms! Capricious and dainty sea!
I am integral with you—I too am of one phase, and of
all phases.

Whitman's cosmopolitan enthusiasm is well illustrated in his equal appreciation of the peculiar attractions of each of the many parts of the nation.

His thrilling delight in Manahatta—his own New York—is no more intense than his homesick yearning for the South. "O Magnet South" is an ecstatic jumble of each and all of the Southern states, but breathes the peculiar aroma of that region. California ideals and possibilities as well as its matchless skies have never been better voiced than by him in the "Song of the Redwood Tree," and in many other references.

The mountain states are not omitted. He speaks of "their delicious, rare atmosphere," and of their "mountain tops innumerable draped in violet haze," and concludes: "Yes, I fell in love with Denver, and even felt a wish to spend my declining and dying days there."

Thus he escapes even that one harmless prejudice from which few are free—love of one's own locality at the expense of other regions. He vies with each and all in appreciation of each and every locality.

Nature is vocalized in the thought of this poet

Ah, from a little child,
Thou knowest, Soul, how to me all sounds became music,
My mother's voice in lullaby or hymn
(The voice, O, tender voices, memory's loving voices
Last miracle of all, O dearest mother's, sister's voices).
The rain, the growing corn, the breeze among the long-leav'd corn,
The measur'd sea-surf beating on the sand,
The twittering bird, the hawk's sharp scream,
The wild fowl's notes at night as flying low, migrating north or south;
The psalm in the country church or mid the clustering trees, the open air camp meeting.
The fiddler in the tavern, the glee, the long-strung sailor song.
The lowing cattle, bleating sheep, the crowing cock at dawn.

"That music always about me," is a chorus formed of all harmonies.

A tenor, strong, ascending with power and health, with glad notes of daybreak I hear,
A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly over the tops of immense waves,
A transparent bass, shuddering lusciously under and through the universe.

The music-lover should study the poem, "Proud Music of the Storm." It contains a fairly good history of music as well as its theory, even though at the end he turns it all into his own dear lesson for the poetic art.

All art must, however, follow the same clue—
Cheerfully tallying life, walking the world—the real
Nourished henceforth by one celestial dream.

Before entering upon Whitman's theory of his art, so closely akin as it is to his reverent love of nature, there should be some reference to the famous memorial poem to Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloomed."

One must not expect to enjoy fully this poem until the right to do so has been earned by hard study.

Is it not strange that the world is so slow to see that the best poetry, like the best music, cannot be at first sight understood or enjoyed to the full?

It is no reproach against a musical composer that his symphony eludes the offhand, impromptu interpretation of an amateur. Why should it settle the fate of a poet? Deeply wrought art in all departments requires study, and then becomes richer in returns through each successive year in which it is given further study.

This poem, in memory of Lincoln, is a richly woven wreath of spring flowers, entwined with evening star and song of the thrush to crown the brow of the fallen hero. It sug-

gests the depressing days in which the slow-drooping star had brought foreboding to the poet of the sinking of humanity's brightest star. It pictures the long black funeral train moving across a continent of breaking hearts to its resting place, but moving over a spring-time carpet. The lilac branch he brings to this coffin he brings alike to all, for death is akin to the sweet natural breath of the flowers.

Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song
for you, O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprig from the bushes.
With loaded arms I come, pausing for you,
For you and the coffins, all of you, O death.

Then, with the thought of death as a comrade upon one side and the fact of death upon the other, the poet fled forth into the forest to hear the thrush's song.

The thrush sings triumphant of those who are
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O death.

The poem closes with the lines:

For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands,
and this for his dear sake
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and cedars dusk and dim.

After all the "much speaking" about Whitman's art or his want of art, there can be no doubt of the one thing he tried for, namely, the simplicity of nature, and harmony in his thought and form with nature's reality and spontaneity.

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth.

There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of earth.

No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account, unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth;

Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the earth.

His poem, "To the Sayers of Words," has in later editions been rechristened, "A Song of the Rolling Earth," in further emphasis of the fact that all art in words must conform to the greatness and individuality of nature's rugged strength and unstereotyped beauty.

The following poem, inspired by Platte Cañon, in Colorado, is the author's own answer to the accusation that his poems have forgotten art. Perhaps, he replies, but they have not forgotten the spirit which formed the rocks, peaks, and gorges of such a scene as this.

Spirit that form'd this scene,
These tumbled rock-piles, grim and red,
These reckless, heaven-ambitious peaks,
These gorges, turbulent-clear streams, this naked fresh-
ness,
These formless wild arrays, for reasons of their own,
I know thee, savage spirit—we have communed together,
Mine, too, such wild arrays, for reasons of their own;
Was't charged against my chants they had forgotten art?
To fuse within themselves its rules precise and deli-
catesse?
The lyrist's measured beat, the wrought-out temple's
grace—column and polished arch forgot?
But Thou that revelest here—spirit that formed this
scene,
They have remember'd thee.

Democracy

X.—Democracy

Democracy!

Near at hand to you a throat is now inflating itself and
joyfully singing.

My Comrade!

For you, to share with me two greatnesses—and a third
one, rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy—and the great-
ness of Religion.

I speak the pass-word primeval—I give the sign of De-
mocracy.

In this topic we reach the pivotal point of the enthusiasms of Walt Whitman. Every other element in his thought is in some way related to this principle—the equality and sacred value of every human being and a free life in society based upon this equality and worth.

He brings to this thought, as we have seen, a unique appreciation of the individual—an individual to which an eternal past of cosmic evolution has contributed and which will have an eternal future in which to fulfill its destiny.

This exaltation of the individual is akin to—indeed, is another aspect of the poet's democracy. Man in his relation to other men—the

larger life of all men with each other in a united humanity is a most vital aspect of the life of the individual. Indeed, the one and the many are of co-equal importance in these poems—each is cause, each is effect. A noble individual is necessary to a noble society, but a noble, equalized fraternity in society is essential to the rounded man or woman.

Whitman's passion of passions is his adoration of America, but it is because it is to him the incarnation of this dual supremacy—the embodiment of the sacred mass made up of sacred, vital units.

The main shapes arise!
Shapes of Democracy total, result of centuries,
Shapes ever projecting other shapes,
Shapes of turbulent, manly cities,
Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,
Shapes bracing the earth and braced with the whole earth.

This democracy is of every sort—political, social, moral.

We have already seen how complete is his sense of comradeship even with the moral outcast, and social democracy breathes in every expression of character ideal. Indeed, the tremendous force of his universal sympathy lies in that atmosphere of democracy which he

gives to every sentiment he utters, whatever the subject.

There remains to be specifically noted his attitude toward political democracy. A government in which laws and officials are minimized and always directly subservient to the will of the people is the only form of social organization which Whitman can tolerate except as an evolutionary stepping stone.

He would rejoice in the time when laws had become unnecessary through the fraternal development of humanity.

The greatest city is one

Where the men and women think lightly of the laws,
Where the slave ceases, and the master of the slave
ceases,
Where the populace rise at once against the never-
ending audacity of elected persons,
Where fierce men and women pour forth, as the sea
to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and
unript waves,
Where outside authority enters always after precedence
of inside authority,
Where the citizen is always the head and the ideal—
and President, Mayor, Governor, and what not,
are agents for pay—
Where children are taught to be laws to themselves
and depend on themselves.

Whitman feels it a supreme duty to urge this self-assertion at the expense of outgrown

law and insidious shackles. It is his "to promulgate liberty; to cheer up slaves and horrify despots; to build for that which builds for mankind; to balance ranks, complexions, creeds, and the sexes; to justify science and the march of equality, and to feed the blood of the brawn-beloved of time."

The following are stanzas from a poem to "A Foiled European Revolutionaire":

Courage yet, my brother or my sister!
Keep on—Liberty is to be subserved whatever occurs;
That is nothing that is quelled by one or two failures,
or any number of failures,
Or by the indifference or ingratitude of the people,
or by any unfaithfulness,
Or the show of the tushes of power, soldiers, cannon,
penal statutes.

What we believe in waits latent forever through all the continents,
Invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and composed, knows no discouragement,
Waiting patiently, waiting its time.
When liberty goes out of a place it is not the first to go,
nor the second or third to go,
It waits for all the rest to go; it is the last.

When there are no more memories of heroes and martyrs,
And when all life and all the souls of men and women are discharged from any part of the earth,

Then only shall liberty, or the idea of liberty, be discharged from that part of the earth,
And the infidel come into full possession.

Then courage, European revolter, revoltress!
For till all ceases, neither must you cease.

The poem to General Grant sounds his pride in the wholesome democracy of America. This plain, simple-hearted Westerner was receiving the homage of the world, and all Americans were thus honored.

What best, I see in thee,
Is not that where thou mov'st down history's great highways,
Ever undimm'd by time, shoots warlike victory's dazzle,
Or that thou sat'st where Washington sat, ruling the land
in peace,
Or thou the man whom feudal Europe feted, venerable
Asia swarm'd upon,
Who walk'd with kings with even face the round world's
promenade;
But that in foreign lands, in all thy walks with kings,
Those prairie sovereigns of the West, Kansas, Missouri,
Illinois,
Ohio's, Indiana's millions, comrades, farmers, soldiers,
all to the front.
Invisibly with thee walking with kings with even face
the round world's promenade,
Were all so justified.

The roots of this poet's theoretical democracy reach with generous, homely strength into the daily commonplace associations of

life, and hence it has 'n it a vitality, reality, and beauty which mere prating of the rights of man cannot give.

Will you seek afar off? You surely will come back at last.

In things best known to you finding the best, or as good as the best.

In folks nearest to you finding the sweetest, strongest, lovingest.

Happiness, knowledge, not in another place, but in this place, not for another hour, but this hour.

Man, in the first you see or touch, always in friend, brother, highest neighbors—woman, in mother, sister, wife.

You workwomen and workmen of the States having your own divine and strong life,

All else giving place to men and women like you.

It is the man that interests this poet as we see at every turn. This is his explanation:

When the psalm sings instead of the singer,

When the script preaches instead of the preacher,

When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver that carved the supporting desk,

When I can touch the body of books by night or by day, and they touch my body back again,

When a university course convinces like a slumbering woman and child convince,

When the minted gold in the vault smiles like the night-watchman's daughter—

When warrantee deeds loaf in chairs opposite and are my friendly companions,

I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of them as I do of men and women like you.

Like all who are launched on any of life's deep currents, Whitman feels the broader stream toward which he is tending.

The future with its inevitable growth in the power of the people and in world-wide freedom and equality is as certain as though it were already the present.

Years of the modern! Years of the unperformed!
Your horizon rises. I see it parting away for more august dramas.

I see not America only, not only Liberty's nation but other nations preparing.

I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the solidarity of races.

I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world's stage.

I see Freedom, completely arm'd and victorious and very haughty, with Law on one side and Peace on the other.

A stupendous trio, all issuing forth against the idea of caste;

What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?

I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions.

I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old aristocracies broken.

I see the landmarks of European kings removed.

I see this day the People beginning their landmarks (all others give way).

The performed America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow behind me.

The unperformed more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me.

In "The Mystic Trumpeter," he appeals to the unseen musician, after he has blown the bugles of the past—of love and of war, of despair and failure, to "vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet"—"some vision of the future"—and there follows:

O glad, exulting, culminating song!
A vigor more than earth's is in thy notes.
Marches of victory—man disenthral'd—the conqueror
at last.
Hymns to the universal God from universal man—all joy!
A reborn race appears—a perfect world, all joy!
Women and men in wisdom, innocence and health—
all joy!
Riotous, laughing bacchanals fill'd with joy!
War, sorrow, suffering gone—the rank earth purged—
nothing but joy left!
The ocean fill'd with joy—the atmosphere all joy!
Joy! Joy! In freedom, worship, love! Joy in the ecstasy
of life!
Enough to merely be! Enough to breathe!
Joy! joy! All over joy!

America

XI.—America

Center of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law, and Love,
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair'd in the adamant of Time.

America means to Whitman the incarnation of sovereign individuals associated in perfect democracy. Hence his adoration of the national ideal.

No subject is the theme of so many poems, none receives such frequent mention in all poems as this idealized, glorified Union of Many in One, which the poet sees in America.

In his earliest poems, he expresses his longing to sing the songs of "These States," but it remained for his maturer years to adequately embody this rapturous devotion and exalted expectation.

His demand upon those who would be poets of America is exacting. They must know its people in all their general traits and local peculiarities, must be "possessed of" its history and great charters; must have rid them-

selves of all feudal poems and have "assumed the poems and processes of democracy"; must be "faithful to things."

His catechism of this would-be poet is searching.

Are you really of the whole People?

Are you not of some coterie? Some school of mere religion?

Are you done with reviews and criticisms of life? Animating now to life itself?

Have you vivified yourself with the Maternity of these States?

Have you, too, the old, ever fresh forbearance and impartiality?

Do you hold the like love for those hardening to maturity? For the last born? Little or big, and for the errant?

He insists that this poet shall be alive and speak for himself, not be a mere amanuensis for worn-out traditions. "Have you not imported this, or the spirit of it in some ship? Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a prettiness?" We must have no more assumption that "what is notoriously gone is still here."

Whitman is not blind to the imperfections of the actual America, but in this, as in all things, he sees the present in the light of the past and the future, and wastes no time in querulous fault-finding.

The best way to rid existing conditions of

their blots is to arouse a sense of the sacred inheritance of the past, the blessed significance of the hopes and plans of the prophets and the mighty possibilities of the future through truth to the higher principles.

The mission of the poet is to see the potential ideal in and through the present, however disappointing—

For the great Idea,
That, O my brethren, that is the mission of poets.

Of these States the poet is the equable man,

The years straying toward infidelity he withholds by his
steady faith,

He is no arguer, he is judgment (Nature accepts him
absolutely).

He judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling
round a helpless thing.

As he sees the farthest he has the most faith,

His thoughts are the hymns of the praise of things.

In the disputes about God and eternity he is silent.

He sees eternity less like a play with prologue and
denouement.

He sees eternity in men and women; he does not see
men and women as dreams or dots.

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free individuals,

For that the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders;

The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies for-
eign despots.

Without extinction is liberty, without retrograde is
Equality.

They live in the feelings of young men and the best women.

(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been always ready to fall for Liberty.)

The history of modern times has been the working-out of two great objects: the strengthening of individuality and the development of organic unity among large bodies of people in society and nation.

Unity and individuality—these have been the *motifs* in great national and social dramas for centuries of human history, and indeed for eras of animal evolution. These have seemed warring for the ascendancy. At times the gain of one would crush to insignificance the other. When national unity secured real existence through the centralization of monarchy, as in France, the individual appeared lost in this larger entity.

In Italy, as the rivalry of cities disintegrated all national life, the individual blossomed into a full development which enriched the wide world. But neither factor could be permanently suppressed. France has, in its later developments with chaos and tumult, shown that the individual must be felt in the united mass.

Italy has, in this century, proven, with scarcely less struggle and pain, that developed

individuals demand a noble national unity for highest expression.

Germany has, with like spiral ascent, compassed national union after an era of individual rule.

To combine the freest growth of the individual with the fullest measure of social unity is the problem of human progress.

Nature is pledged to each alike. Evolution is bent upon the union of these apparent enemies. It will find means to perfect the units while it makes equally complete their union.

Walt Whitman unites in remarkable fashion the most intense devotion to each of these conceptions. No one could assert with more uncompromising insistence that the individual is the Alpha and Omega of all things, and yet no one has ever given such reality and transcending allegiance to the Larger Whole.

This is possible because there is no contradiction between the two. The best developed person is he or she who can enter most devotedly into unity with all.

There are two commandments, but the second is "like unto" the first.

The following is typical of Whitman's insistence upon the supremacy of the individual:

Fall behind me, States!
A man before all—myself, typical, before all,
Underneath all, individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me which ignores individuals;
The American compact is altogether with individuals.
The only government is that which makes minute of
Individuals.
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly
to one single individual—namely, to You.

Whitman's patriotism always breathes in large spaces. It is never a thoughtless, instinctive hurrah. Philosophy, science, history, have all entered into the fiber of his being, and made a nature which responds profoundly to the existing order, because realizing its vast cosmic significance.

Back of the America of to-day with its approximate freedom he sees the eternity of slow evolution in universe and planet, the long, long ages of human struggle and the centuries of national development.

The present, sacred with hard-won inheritance, the future freighted with responsibility confidently met. These make of this poet's love of country a veritable religion.

Brain of the New World, what a task is thine;
To formulate the Modern . . .
By vision, hand, conception, on the background of the
mighty past, the dead,
To limn with absolute faith the mighty living present.

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy;
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only;
The Past is also stored in thee;
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone; not of the
Western Continent alone;
Earth's *résumé* entire floats on thy keel, O ship, is steadied
by thy spars,
With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations
sink or swim with thee,
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics,
wars, thou bearest the other continents,
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port
triumphant;
Steer, then, with good strong hand and wary eye, O
helmsman, thou carryest great companions.

The poems of the war are filled with tender, spirited sympathy. He admires the sturdy manhood of it all, glories in its heroism—believes so much in the storm that every detail in his realistic descriptions takes on dignity and worth.

In his war experiences, Whitman got hold of life more intimately than at any other point. His admiration of women and of human affairs seems a trifle like hearsay sometimes, but on the battlefield and in the hospital he found reality. Here he met men of all kinds and of all ages, and how he loved them!

There is no academic affection here, no theoretical approval, but a daily test under prosaic and often loathsome conditions and

the great heart grew more gentle, more tender, more passionately devoted with each additional homesick breast which rested comforted upon his own.

It is hard to see why the world has so calmly accepted the opinion that tenderness, sympathy, and responsive sentiment are peculiarly the property of women. Even our false training and standards cannot do more than give a thin crustiness to the great-hearted warmth of nature which blesses the larger part of the masculine species. When Whitman is better known, it will tend to remove even the external crust.

So much of incident enters into the war poems that extracts are inadequate.

The following lines close the verses "A Dirge for Two Veterans":

O strong dead-march, you please me!
O moon immense with your silvery face, you soothe me!
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!

What have I also to give you?

The moon gives you light,
And the bugles and drums give you music,
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
My heart gives you love.

The close of the war left the poet baptized with renewed faith and hope. "The drum of war had been his because he believed in its

justice and necessity. "War, red war," had been his song while the sacred unity he adored had been in the balance, but he rejoiced most keenly in the possibility of peace.

The significance of a volunteer army deeply impressed him. In Washington he watched the thousands of thousands of soldiers on the final parade, and then, in an instant as he gazed, they were gone, absorbed again into the currents of the general life.

A pause—the armies wait,
A million flush'd, embattled conquerors wait,
The world too waits, then soft as breaking night and
sure as dawn,
They melt, they disappear.

Exult, O lands! victorious lands!
Not there your victory on those red, shuddering fields;
But here and hence your victory.

Melt, melt away, ye armies—disperse, ye blue-clad
soldiers,
Resolve ye back again, give up for good your deadly
arms,
Other the arms—the fields henceforth for you, or South
or North,
With saner wars, sweet wars, life-giving wars.

A large standing army would have horrified Whitman. He is bard of "latent armies, a million soldiers waiting ever-ready," never of a hired soldiery doomed to demoralizing idleness or blasphemous activity.

Genuine humanity-prompted war has meaning and final beneficence, when inevitable. It proves again that humankind is not sordid or commercialized beyond readiness to die for an Idea.

The poem, "Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deep," is a glorification of the storm in nature or in society. He craves primal energy, earth-creating volcanoes, thundering dauntlessness, and the satisfaction which had formerly come only from ocean surge and Niagara crashing had at last been given by the magnificent human uprising of the war.

But now I no longer wait, I am fully satisfied, I am
glutted,
I have witness'd the true lightning, I have witness'd my
cities electric,
I have lived to behold man burst forth and warlike
America rise,
Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern
solitary wilds,
No more the mountains roam or sail the stormy sea.

America is always to Whitman "The Mother," and the most perfect and profound of his poems to her is that beginning "Thou, mother, with thy equal brood."

While never carpingly critical, he does not
fail the national dangers. He knows

that "in a smiling mask death shall approach
beguiling thee, that a livid cancer may spread
its hideous claws, clinging upon thy breasts,
seeking to strike the deep within."

But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases, and sur-
mount them all,
They each and all shall lift and pass away and cease
from thee.

One of his latest poems celebrates the marvel
of "Election Day." The most powerful
scene in America is not Niagara or Yosemite,
but "America's choosing day"—

The still small voice vibrating,
The final ballot-shower from East to West—the para-
dox and conflict,
The countless snowflakes falling—(a swordless conflict,
Yet more than all Rome's wars of old, or modern
Napoleon's) the peaceful choice of all.

The short poems to the flag are among the
choicest gems of these poems. Nothing trite
is in them, but always vital, brimful meaning,
always the symbol of the nation and a nation
committed to humanity and the ideal.

Thou mental moral orb—thou New, indeed new Spiritual
World!
The Present holds thee not—for such vast growth as
thine,
For such unparalleled flight as thine, such brood as
thine,
The Future only holds thee and can hold thee.

O hasten flag of man—O with sure and steady step,
passing highest flag of kings,
Walk supreme to the heaven's mighty symbol—run
up above them all,
Flag of stars! thick-sprinkled bunting!

Comradeship

XII.—Comradeship

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone
upon;
I will make divine magnetic lands
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the
rivers of America,
Along the shores of the Great Lakes, and all over the
prairies;
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each
other's necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you,
“ma femme!”
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.

The circle of Whitman's thought finds its
perfect round in the idea of comradeship.

Abstract approval of men and principles
does not satisfy him. He vitalizes all with the
warmth and color of personal human affection.

He has written no love poems of the com-
mon sort, but most of his poems are love
poems of the most ardent type, addressed,

however, to anyone and everyone—man or woman, coarse or gentle, good or bad.

This is not the ordinary love to man of the benevolent; it is the passionate fervor of the enamored.

All the high-minded writers have lauded Friendship. In reading Emerson or Thoreau on Friendship one wonders if they are not after all writing of something too ethereal and mystical for this prosaic sphere.

Moreover, they confine their expectations of friendship to the very few, and even suggest that it may never be found upon the earth. Whitman draws no boundaries. He not only does not limit the number of his friends, but he expressly invites all men, even the unborn, into the circle of his affections, and urges upon each a like inclusive ardor. And yet it is personal affection he offers and asks for in return. He sees a live oak growing vigorously all alone apart from other trees. He wonders how it can grow and thrive and "utter joyous leaves," when there was no friendship for it. He is sure he could not.

When I peruse the conquer'd fame of heroes and the
victories of mighty generals, I do not envy the
generals,

Nor the president in his presidency, nor the rich in his
great house;

But when I hear of the brotherhood of lovers, how it was
with them,
How together through life, through dangers, odium, un-
changing long and long;
Through youth and through middle and old age, how un-
faltering, how affectionate and faithful they were,
Then I am pensive—I hastily walk away fill'd with the
bitterest envy.

Whitman keeps the perspective in human values. We are too apt in the hurry of buying and selling, coming and going to forget that nothing really counts except the things that make us live deeply and enjoy truly.

People come to be a part of the world's furniture. They make the wheels go 'round for us in practical affairs. We forget that they are human souls with rich capacities for fellowship and sympathy. Many of them belong to us by some kinship of feeling or experience. They would enlarge the heart's boundaries for us, if the stone fences of our indifference did not close us in.

This poet would raze to the ground all fences. Conventions, formalities, foolishness, which keep us from making the world electric with an all-around hand-clasp, he would away with.

The measure of a man is found in his capacity for affection, and the wider the range of those who receive this "ocean of love freely poured forth," the greater the man.

His dependence for that glorious America of the future is upon this growing "love of man for his comrades."

He dreams that the adoring admiration which he himself possesses for the typical American, in each and every phase, may become an enthusiasm common to the whole people. The legal ties of a common government would then be made vital by the glowing life streams of fraternity.

Man, fulfilling himself in an organic democracy—that democracy incarnated in America with her rich race inheritance. America, the nation, vivified by citizens bound to each other through a hearty comradeship and all-pervading personal good will—this is the sequence of Whitman's great conceptions.

I dreamed in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks
of the whole of the rest of the earth;
I dream'd that was the new city of friends;
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust
love—it led the rest;
It was seen every hour in the action of the men of the
city,
And in all their looks and words.

Again he affirms:

I believe the main purport of these states is to found a
superb friendship, exalted, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting,
latent in all men.

Probably nothing is more unique in Whitman than this faith in the coming lover-bond to unite the children of earth. It is akin, of course, to the old, old story, of the reign of brotherhood destined to come to the earth, but Whitman gives it an utterly new coloring, and it is only upon second thought that one associates it at all with the more general teaching. In the poet it is alive and human—a sturdy, wholesome heartiness of good will that carries contagion in its atmosphere.

This, from the "Drum Taps," is characteristic of this spirit, and voices again, his confidence for America:

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,
Be not dishearten'd, affection shall solve the problem of
freedom yet;
Those who love each other shall become invincible;
They shall yet make Columbia victorious.
No danger shall balk Columbia's lovers;
If need be a thousand shall sternly immolate themselves
for me.
The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,
The continuance of equality shall be comrades.
These shall tie you and band you stronger than hoops of
iron;
I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of lovers
tie you.
(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers?
Or by agreement on a paper? or by arms?
Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so cohere.)

The bugle call to march in untried paths is frequently given. In all the poems which sound the note of courage for innovation there is always a strong ring of joy in companionship.

The poem, "Pioneers," should appeal peculiarly to western citizens, who can appreciate all the conditions which he suggests in his symbolism. The comfortable, easy-going paths of conformity seem tame, indeed, in the hearing of this martial strain urging advance.

Come, my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready.
Have you your pistols? Have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

For we cannot tarry here;
We must march, my darlings, we must bear the brunt of
danger,
We, the youthful, sinewy races, all
The rest on us depend.
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

O, you youths, Western youths,
So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and
friendship,
Plain I see you Western youths, all you tramping with
the foremost.
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

Colorado men are we,
From the peaks gigantic, from the great sierras and the
high plateaus,
From the mine and from the gully, from the hunting
trail, we come,
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

• • •
O, resistless, restless race!
O, beloved race in all! O, my breast aches with tender
love for all.
O, I mourn and yet exult, I am wrapped in love for all,
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

• • •
O, you daughters of the West!
O, you young and elder daughters!
O, you mothers and you wives!
Never must you be divided, in our ranks you move united,
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

• • •
Till with sound of trumpet.
Far, far off the day break calls — hark! how loud and clear
I hear it wind,
Swift, to the head of the army! Swift, spring to your
places,
Pioneers! O, Pioneers!

Metaphysical puzzles are usually met by Whitman with some recognition of reality in simple experience. No experience solves so much for him as this fact of human affection.

When the "terrible doubt" overtakes him regarding the reality of all about, and the verity of identity beyond the grave, then, if

he may but be near a friend, he is "charged with untold and untellable wisdom," and requires nothing farther. He cannot answer the questions.

But I walk or sit indifferent, I am completely satisfied,
He, ahold of my hand, has completely satisfied me.

This is not an idle fancy, but has in it profound meaning. No facts are so real as the inner facts. What we see or hear we may doubt. What we feel we know to be real.

In consciousness of love within we strike bed rock. Whatever else is mysterious, upon that we may build. And a world with love in it is worth while, even if a puzzling world.

Another poem has a professor instruct his class as he closes a course in the great philosophies, that underneath all the teachings of all the great thinkers—more fundamental than all

The dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend,
Of the well-married husband and wife, of children and parent,
Of city for city and land for land.

In one of Olive Schreiner's dreams she shows us a painter whose wondrous color astonished the world. "Where do you get your color from?" the watchers asked, as the pic-

ture grew more marvelously red with rich, warm glow.

At last the painter died, and then they searched in vain for the pot of wonderful red paint. They did not find it, but upon the breast of the artist they found a scar—an old scar with ragged edges—and still they asked: "Where did he get his color from?"

Whatever else Walt Whitman has tried to do, no one can doubt that he has written from the inmost sources of his life. He has tried to be all that nature would have him and give back to his larger self—all humanity—the life-blood it loaned him.

Trickle drops; my blue veins leaving!
O, drops of me! trickle, slow drops,
Candid from me falling, drip, bleeding drops,
From wounds made to free you whence you were
prison'd.
From my face, from my forehead and lips,
From my breast, from within, where I was conceal'd,
 press forth, red drops, confession drops,
Stain every page, stain every song I sing, every word I
 say, bloody drops,
Let them know your scarlet heat, let them glisten,
Saturate them with yourself, all ashamed and wet,
Glow upon all I have written or shall write, bleeding
 drops,
Let it all be seen in your light, blushing drops.

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